

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
CORPORATE GOVERNANCE GROUP MEETING**

**WEDNESDAY, 8 JULY 2009
(9.00 - 10.40 AM)**

Present: P Haywood (Chief Executive), D Macnab (Deputy Chief Executive), J Akerman (Chief Internal Auditor), C O'Boyle (Director of Corporate Support Services), R Palmer (Director of Finance and ICT) and I Willett (Assistant to the Chief Executive)

**Apologies for
Absence:**

Place: Room 1.29, 323 Building, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping

22. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING - 10.6.09

Agreed.

23. MATTERS ARISING

**(a) Recruitment – Report to the Audit and Governance Committee
(Minute 15)**

Noted that in addition to the proposals contained in the original report, it was now proposed to include a risk analysis in relation to all vacant posts giving a statement as to the risks attaching to failure to fill.

ACTION:

Service Directors to note.

**(b) Meetings of Cabinet Members, County Councillors and Local MPs
(Minute 19)**

Noted that meetings in the previous format have now been discontinued and attendees had been advised accordingly.

(c) Freedom of Information Act – Officer Responsibility (Minute 20)

Noted that G Lunnun was now back at work.

24. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None for this meeting.

25. TERMS OF REFERENCE

Noted.

26. AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE - 22.6.09

Noted that the following points had arisen at the Audit and Governance Committee meeting:

- (a) concern expressed by Committee members about the absence of Directors or their representatives in connection with limited assurance reports which were under review;
- (b) concern about attendance at Corporate Governance Group meetings by the Chairman; and
- (c) request by the Committee for summaries of all Audit Commission publications received by the Council.

Agreed that the issue of attendance by Directors at all Governance Committee meetings be referred to the next Management Board meeting.

Agreed that the Performance Management Unit be asked to submit the executive summaries from Audit Commission reports with the inclusion of an appropriate web link to the full report on the Audit Commission web site.

ACTION:

Service Directors to note.

S Tautz to pursue issue of Audit Commission summaries.

27. NATIONAL FRAUD INITIATIVE (NFI) - ELECTORAL ROLL/COUNCIL TAX DATA MATCHES

Noted that 744 matches had been notified in the recent exercise involving the Electoral Roll and Council Tax records.

Noted that the total was in excess of the national average for local authorities and that a sample check of the top five in value had taken place.

Noted that of the top five one discount had already been cancelled, one related to a query about student domicile and that of the remaining three there appeared to be genuine queries in those cases which were being pursued.

Noted that in the Council Tax division additional staffing was being provided to continue research on data matches.

Agreed that a larger sample of matches should be investigated, (i.e. the top 25 sums) and that consideration be given to allowing Council Tax staff access to signed electoral registration forms in specific cases for the purposes of prevention of fraud.

Agreed that such applications should be directed to the Registration Officer on an individual basis.

ACTION:

R Pavey/W MacLeod to note.

28. GRANGE FARM TRUST

Noted that correspondence had been received from various parties associated with litigation over a right of way over the Grange Farm Site which were quoting this Council as having given joint instructions with the owners of the land for the purposes of the legal action.

Noted that no such instructions had been given by this Council and there had been no consultation with the Council prior to the litigation process having been launched.

Agreed that this unsatisfactory situation could mean that the Council would be party to any losses or costs arising from this litigation.

Noted that an e-mail enquiry had been sent to the instructing solicitors on 19 June 2009 regarding instructions from this Council but to date no reply had been received.

Agreed that this enquiry be followed up as a matter of urgency.

Noted that certain anonymous information had been received by the Council concerning the Grange Farm Trust.

Agreed that this matter be referred to the Charities Commission as the appropriate regulatory body with a request for advice on how the matter should be pursued and whether the local trustees appointed by the Council should be briefed on the matter.

ACTION:

A Mitchell to pursue the issue of instructions by this Council in regard to the right of way litigation.

C O'Boyle to write to the Charity Commission enclosing copies of the anonymous representations regarding Grange Farm Trust and seeking advice on Trustee briefing.

29. STANDARDS COMMITTEE

(a) Schedule of Assessments, Reviews and Adjudications

Noted.

(b) Budgetary Position 2009/2010

Noted that an external investigator had been found in respect of two joined complaints against councillors and that costs had been carefully managed so that there was no immediate prospect of an overspend.

Agreed that the budgetary position should continue to be monitored.

ACTION:

C O'Boyle/I Willett to monitor and report where necessary.

30. DECEASED MEMBER OF STAFF - PAYMENT OF SALARY

Noted that an application had been received from the children of a former member of staff who had died in service for payment of outstanding salary.

Agreed that further advice be given to the family on the need to establish an estate to act as recipient of outstanding monies from the Council and elsewhere.

ACTION:

P Maginnis to pursue.

31. COUNCIL TAX/NNDR ARREARS - MEMBER OF THE COUNCIL

Noted that one member of the Council had been found to be in substantial arrears with Council Tax payments and National Non Domestic Rates.

Noted that the usual advice notice was about to be sent to the member in question advising that until the debts were cleared there was a prohibition on discussion of any matters relating to Council Tax and budgets in respect of any authority to which the member had been elected.

ACTION:

R Palmer/I Willett to pursue.

32. INTERNAL AUDIT - PARTNERSHIP WORKING WITH EXTERNAL PROVIDER

Noted that it had been requested that a report be submitted on the principle of securing partnership working with an external provider in respect of elements of the Internal Audit operation.

Agreed that a report be submitted to the Cabinet APG at its August meeting.

ACTION:

J Akerman/B Bassington to pursue.

33. ACCESS BY COUNCILLORS TO THE OFFICES

Agreed that the question of access by one member of the Council to "back office" operations in a Directorate should be discussed with the Leader of Council by P Haywood and D Macnab.

ACTION:

P Haywood/D Macnab to pursue.

34. DATE FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Next meeting 5 August 2009 at 9.00 a.m. in the Chief Executive's Office.